

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OLDER PEOPLE

- For people of all ages, physical activity improves the quality of life in many ways. Physical benefits include improved and increased balance, strength, coordination, flexibility and endurance. Physical activity has also shown to improve mental health, motor control and cognitive function.
- Active lifestyles provide older persons with regular occasions to make new friendships, maintain social networks, and interact with other people of all ages. Improved flexibility, balance, and muscle tone can help prevent falls – a major cause of disability among older people. It has been found that the prevalence of mental illness is lower among people who are physically active.
- The benefits of physical activity can be enjoyed even if regular practice starts late in life. Common diseases among older people are cardiovascular disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, and hypertension. While being active from an early age can help prevent many diseases, regular movement and activity can also help relieve the disability and pain associated with these conditions.
- Physical activity can also contribute greatly to the management of some mental disorders such as depression and Alzheimer's disease. Organized exercise sessions, appropriately suited to an individual's fitness level, or simply casual walks can provide the opportunity for making new friends and maintaining ties with the community, reducing feelings of loneliness and social exclusion. Physical activity improves self-confidence and self-sufficiency – qualities that are the foundation of psychological well-being.
- As for people of all ages, older persons should take part in physical activities they enjoy the most. Anyone with a specific condition or disability that could affect their ability to be physically active should seek the advice of a doctor before participating in physical activity. Walking, swimming, stretching, dance, gardening, hiking and cycling are all excellent activities for older persons.
- The number of people over 60 years old is projected to double in the next 20 years. Most of these older persons will be living in developing countries. Reducing and postponing age-related disability is an essential public health measure and physical activity can play an important role in creating and sustaining well-being at all ages.

